

California Dreaming by TheCapitol

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Summary:

In January of 1985 Steve Harrington reached a new low point in his life. He was still traumatized by the the events of the past and was struggling with his new position as loner in Hawkins High.

Unfortunately for Hawkins and Steve, the Upside Down did not vanish with the rescue of Will Byers and the exorcism of the Mind Flyer and would soon creep back into their lives that had just become somewhat normal again.

And if that wasn't enough, Billy Hargrove, the handsome asshole that beat him up some months ago, would not leave Steve alone and continued to agitate him in the weirdest ways possible.

This story takes place after the Second Season and will from then on

diverge from the canon universe.

California Dreaming

Author's Note:

A warm welcome to every reader of this story!

I had the idea for a rewritten Season 3 of Stranger Things already over a year ago, but I finally got the confidence to post the prologue that I have written already.

The story will center around Steve's perspective and how he copes with the dark reality of Hawkins, his mental health issues and Billy Hargrove who slowly creeps his way into Steve's life. There could be minor romantic involvement with other characters but the main ship is Steve Harrington X Billy Hargrove.

Please be advised that this fan fiction MIGHT include possible triggering content such as:

Depression, semi-graphic violence, homophobia, self harm, underage drinking, self esteem issues.

This will be a longer project, as the plot is thick and slow burn fan fictions are my passion.

English is not my native tongue and I don't have a beta reader, so I apologise in advance for the occurring grammar, spelling and stylistic mistakes!

I cannot promise a timely and regular update schedule as I'm also writing on another active fan fiction (If you are by any chance a mcyt and DreamNotFound fan, feel free to check out "Second Chances"), but I will try my best!

I wish everyone who reads this a pleasant day or night and thank you again for choosing this work!

I would appreciate any comments, criticism and kudos!

Lot's of love from Capitol!

(For anyone interested: my pronouns are he/him and I'm in my early twenties)

Friday, January 4th, 1985 in Hawkins Indiana, United States of America

With a sigh, Steve stepped into his house and let the heavy door snap shut behind him. As expected, the house was dead quiet again. His father was off to some business meeting and Steve was pretty sure that he took his blonde secretary with him. His mother on the other hand was spending the days at her sister's place, not wanting to stay in the empty house herself. So that burden was passed along to Steve.

It had been an exhausting week for Steve, even if nothing in particular did occur. But simply navigating through his Highschool life and babysitting the kids from the Party, whom he loved dearly, used up all his energy. He could not comprehend how he managed to juggle monster fighting, relationship drama, Highschool and everything else in the last two years.

The only positive outlook of the winter holidays was, that he seemed to be finally over the breakup with Nancy. He could not deny that the hurtful words of her still replayed endlessly in his mind, but at least he did not feel a stinging pang of jealousy when he saw her together with Jonathan. Surprisingly he actually managed to befriend the new boyfriend of his ex. Needless to say that their personalities were diametrically opposed, but they somehow worked around that. He was glad that Jonathan forgave him for his shitty behavior in the past and Nancy actually seemed happier with Jonathan than she ever was with him.

On the other hand, he continued to struggle with his self-confidence. After the rather harsh breakup with Nancy, his fallout with Tommy and Carol, as well as the ongoing taunting by Billy Hargrove the asshole, his self-doubts had reached new record highs. His pretty mediocre grades were not of any help.

After standing in the hallway for a moment he took off his jacket and threw it carelessly on the floor next to the shoes. Walking towards the kitchen he noticed that the telephone on the wall of the hallway indicated that someone had tried to reach him as he was out. As he figured that it would be either one of his parents he decided to call back later as he was not in the mood for hearing either of their voices at the moment.

Currently, he was way too hungry to care about much else. He had not eaten anything today, another one of his many bad habits, and therefore stepped into the gloomy kitchen. Given that it was mid of January, the sun had already set and the sterile kitchen looked even greyer and uninviting than usual.

A quick look into his fridge made him groan. He had not been shopping this week and the food that his mother had left him was nearly all gone. A package of milk, a few eggs, some beers, and some cucumbers were the only items inside. He grabbed himself a beer and closed the fridge again. As he cracked the can open he contemplated whether he should order something, but decided against it for now. The beer would enter his system quicker if he had no distracting food, even if it meant ignoring his rumbling stomach.

With the cold beer can in his hand, he made his way upstairs to his room. While the rest of the house was quite in order, clean, and seemed like it was taken out of a sales catalog, Steve's own room was the complete opposite. Posters of questionable taste hung his walls, piles of worn and dirty clothes were scattered on the floor, the bed was unmade, and empty beer cans were collecting dust on his right nightstand.

Steve chuckled at the sight of his messed-up room. He really felt even worse and tried to compensate for that by taking another huge gulp

from his beer. If he was honest, last year he could not even stand the bitter taste of beer and only drank it for status reasons. But now he got accustomed to the taste and the way it made him feel lightheaded and a bit disconnected from his pathetic existence.

Putting his beer aside he opened his drawer and pulled a crumpled package of Marlboro Lights out. Steve would not call himself outright addicted to cigarettes, but in the recent weeks, he could not help but smoke every now and then.

And since his parents would probably not be back before Monday, he could even do so in his own room, without stepping outside into the freezing cold of a January evening. He pulled out one of the last cigarettes from the nearly empty pack and fished around his pockets to find his lighter.

Steve lit up his cigarette and brought it to his lips. He filled his lungs with the smoke and enjoyed his nicotine kick. The first drag was always the best and it made him calm down and feel at ease almost immediately. He continued to alternate between taking a drag and downing his beer.

When his cigarette burned out he stubbed it out on the overflowing ashtray on his left side and threw the empty can on the floor, next to the other ones. Steve walked over to his new CD player that he got for Christmas from his parents. While most of his music was on records, he had bought himself some of his cherished acts on CD.

Since he was alone anyway he picked up his new favorite album of WHAM! „Make it big“ and turned up the music. He was sure his fellow classmates and in particular, the Hargrove kid would laugh at him if they knew what he was listening to in his free time. But his social status could not really get much worse now anyway. He still made sure to only pull up to school while playing an „appropriate“ radio station that would not make him any more of an outcast at Hawkins High.

But in the privacy of his home, he could dwell on his extravagant music taste. While „Heartbeat“ was blaring from his new speakers he made his way down to the kitchen to grab yet another beer. It was Friday evening, after all, so he did not feel the usual guilt he had

when he decided to drink on his own.

As he started to feel the effects of the alcohol manifesting inside him he started to hum to the music and felt a bit better after all. The decision to drink on an empty stomach paid off in the end.

As soon as he was in his room again, he lit up another cigarette and filled his lungs yet again with the toxic smoke. This time he stood at the window which he opened up and looked outside onto the deserted road and into the forest. No matter how many weeks had passed from his last encounter with the monsters from the 'Upside Down' he could not help but shiver at the sight of the eerie trees moving in the wind.

These haunting memories would for sure follow him his whole life. He could not even start to comprehend how the kids were coping with it. While for most of the Party it was more of an otherworldly adventure, for the young Byers it was a journey through hell and back. If even Steve, who was not the main character in this whole ordeal and an adult, suffered from long-lasting anxiety, nightmares, and constant uneasiness, he could not imagine how Will got by.

He sometimes wondered if Nancy or Jonathan were going through the same trauma, or if he was the weak one who could not grapple with the dark reality of the world. When he was still with Nancy they did not talk a lot about the Upside Down or any of the strange occurrences. Maybe that was the reason why he and Nancy never worked out in the end. Jonathan and Nancy experienced their first contact with the Upside Down together, while Steve himself was busy being a grade-A asshole, oblivious to the real world.

Instinctively Steve looked behind him to spot his nail bat, which was standing casually near his door. While the bat belonged to Nancy after all, and Jonathan was the one to hammer the deadly nails into it, none questioned that it did belong to Steve. Before the New Year, Steve used to carry the bat in his trunk every time he drove to school and only now compromised on keeping it in his bedroom.

Steve was so lost in his thoughts that he did not notice that his

cigarette was burning down without being used. When the burned down ash fell on his finger and the filter started to burn, he cursed and quickly threw the bud out of the window.

He swept the ash off his right hand and spit on the spot where he burned himself. If Steve was being honest he did not mind the stinging pain all too much, if it was not for the red spot on his ring finger. While it would be an understatement to say that Steve was unhappy with his outer appearance he did take pride in his hands for some reason.

He proceeded to close the window again as the cold breeze getting inside was becoming too uncomfortable. Just as he wanted to finish his second beer, a ringing cut through the quiet house. Steve nearly tripped over his own feet but managed to put the can down and peeked out of the window.

As the doorbell rang for the second time, Steve cursed and ran to the bathroom. He rummaged around his cabinet to find his mouthwash and quickly rinsed his mouth, hoping it would cover the smell of beer and cigarettes. Whoever was standing in front of the door, he did not want that person to figure out his pathetic Friday afternoon ritual.

After he spat out the mouthwash and rushed downstairs, he managed to open the door, right as the person outside rang for the third time. In the cold stood no other than Dustin. Steven tried not to roll his eyes at the sight of the unexpected visit. He loved the kid, no doubt, but tonight he was really not in the mood to deal with a middle schooler.

„Hey Steve!“, Dustin exclaimed happily, completely oblivious to his interrupting visit. He was wearing a large bright red winter coat and spotted a ridiculous Christmas-themed beanie. Steve was hundred percent sure that this over-the-top outfit was the fault of Dustin's overprotective mother Mrs. Henderson.

„Hey Dustin“, Steve answered, way less enthusiastic, „What are you doing so late here?“. He tried to lean coolly against the door frame and look unbothered, even if deep down he just wanted to be alone.

„Sorry for bothering you, Your Majesty!“, Dustin answered and made a little mocking bow, the hint of sarcasm in his tone not to be overheard, „It’s just that Mike called me, that Lucas called him, that he and Max are at the arcade and wanted us to join.“. Steve could already guess where this would lead to but let Dustin finish. „So we wondered if you could take me and Mike there?“.

Steve did not answer right away, so Dustin chose his best weapon, his pouty face, and added a whining „Pleaseeee! Lucas apparently beat Max in one of the games and we have to be there to celebrate that victory!“. Steve sighed and gave in, he could not turn Dustin away, no matter how shitty he felt: „Fine, just gimme a minute.“

He turned around, grabbed his jacket that still laid on the ground and slipped into his shoes. Steve made a detour into his kitchen to grab the pack of chewing gums and popped one into his mouth just to be safe. When he stepped outside, Dustin was already waiting at the left side of his BMW, eager to get into the car.

The ride to the Wheelers house was quite uneventful, Dustin continued to bite Steve's ear off and talked about all the more or less uninteresting things that had happened this week. While Steve was only listening halfway, he could not deny that the distraction was tuning out his mellow other thoughts.

When he pulled up at the Wheelers house, Mike was already standing outside. His cheeks were flushed and his hands were buried deep in the pockets of his coat. He must have been waiting outside for a while already.

When the Wheeler kid jumped inside, a heated conversation erupted between them. Steve was not quite sure what it was exactly about, but he guessed it was all about yet another new game in the arcade and the strategies to beat Max’s records like Lucas apparently managed.

After a few moments, he tuned completely out of the conversation between the boys and turned the radio on. As the designated taxi and babysitter of all the kids, it was a somewhat welcome routine to drive

them around.

As they arrived at the arcade, the rest of the daylight had already vanished and only the artificial light of the streetlamps and buildings illuminated the environment. „When do you guys have to be back?“, he asked them as he parked backward near the entrance.

Dustin glanced on his wristwatch: „Well actually in around an hour...“, he answered. Mike just nodded along. Usually, the Wheelers were a bit more lenient than the Henderson's, but Steve figured that Mike did not want to rub it under Dustin's nose that his curfew might be later.

„Alright boys, I will wait in the car then.“, Steve said as Dustin and Mike climbed out of the car and made their way to the Arcade. Steve opened the driver's door and shouted after them: „Be punctual or I'll have to carry you back!“. It was no unusual occasion that he had to personally usher them out of the arcade as the kids were just glued to the screens. „Sure thing Steve!“, Dustin shouted back before vanishing behind the doors with Mike.

Steve sighed for the umpteenth time this Friday and reclined his seat. If he was lucky he could take a quick nap before dealing with driving a group of hyperactive middle schoolers back to their homes.

Steve turned on the radio on low volume before he closed his eyes. While he was tired he did not actually fall asleep. However, he managed to dose on and off for a while.

Though his rest was abruptly cut short by the sound of obnoxiously loud music playing outside his car. Judging by the blaring aggro rock that was distracting his well-deserved rest time, only one guy could be seriously taken into consideration to be the nuisance.

As he was pretty sure it would Billy Hargrove and Steve had no intention to make himself noticeable he just continued to lay still and endure the insufferable music as best as he could. And since the only reason Billy would turn up to a ‚childish‘ place like the Arcade, it meant that he was there to pick Max up.

A sudden bang on his car took Steve right out of his thoughts and he shot up. Billy was standing on the driver's side, his hand resting on the top of the car after having hit it. Steve prayed for the health of his beamer. If Billy managed to put a dent into his beloved car, he would fight him, once again.

Though if he actually thought about it, he would not actually fight Billy again. Steve was not very proud of it, but it seemed like he was really not made for fistfights. Not only did he lose his stupid fight with Jonathan in the streets last year, but he was also pathetically beaten up by the Californian asshole not too long ago. Even if that was the last time Billy had physically assaulted him, he had no intention of getting beat bloody one more time.

Steve knew he was inferior to Billy, at least in the physical sense. That fact had been proven time after time in Basketball practice, which he continued to skip more often. So he knew that all he could do is bite his tongue and try to not get too annoyed.

Said asshole was still leaning lazily against the car, disgustingly chewing a gum and looking at him with his stupid smug smirk. He was wearing a white shirt with at least half the buttons open, exposing his toned chest under a black leather jacket. It was a mystery how he had not frozen to death, as the temperature was well in the low twenties.

As Billy made no move to leave him alone, Steve gave in and let his window roll down. He was grateful yet again to have power windows, at it made him look way less stupid than rolling the window down himself.

„Why are you bothering me?“, Steve asked Billy, trying to keep the irritation out of his voice.

„Did I interrupt your beauty sleep, pretty boy?“, Billy asked back, completely ignoring his question. Steve closed his eyes in annoyance at the nickname Billy was too happy to always use.

„You should try it out yourself“, he shot back looking critically up and down, „you could need it.“. Well, that was only half true, no one with at least one functioning eye could deny that Billy was not

handsome. However, now that he mustered the other's face a little more extensively, even the gloomy light could not hide his dark circles around his eyes. He also spotted a dark blue-green bruise near his left eye. Only God knew which fights he picked up again.

„Someone is touchy today!“, his smug grin widened into an amused smile which did not help Steve's irritation with the other boy. „Anyway“, Billy continued hitting the top of the car again, „You know when the little shitheads are finished playing their fucking games?“.

Steve looked on his wristwatch, it was already five minutes past half nine, so it was indeed time for the kids to come back. „Should be around now I guess“, he answered unsurely, „If you need to pick up Max now, look for yourself, the Arcade isn't that huge. Even you can't get lost in there.“

„Ahh well...“, Billy said, „Now that's the issue. How about you go inside and get Max out. These are your kids anyway“. The request startled Steve actually. Why in the hell could Billy not go and fetch his sister, well step sister, himself.

He did not answer for a few seconds trying to figure out the motives of the other guy but to no avail. „Why can't you go yourself?“, he questioned Billy who laughed and said: „I'm not going into the childish Arcade. I have my standards and can't risk my image“, he made a small pause leaning towards him, „But you my friend, have nothing to lose“.

Steve could feel his blood start to boil at the snarky remarks and he closed his eyes in exasperation. „And why the hell should I do that for you?“, he asked Billy who looked unfazed at the anger building up in Steve.

„If you go and fetch Max for me I won't need to annoy you anymore.“, he drawled. If Billy would actually follow through with this, Steve would gladly go into the badly ventilated Arcade and do him this favor. However, he was sure that at maximum, Billy would leave him alone for tonight.

Not being in any mood to argue with the asshole and the kids being

late, he made the decision to go run errands for Billy after all. He mostly convinced himself that he did this with his own desire to soon be back at home in mind.

Steve made sure to roll his eyes exaggeratedly as he huffed a „Fine!“, and started to get out of the car. Billy stepped aside gracefully to let him out. When he made his way to the entrance of the Arcade, he stopped midway and turned around: „And stop touching my car, Hargrove!“, he shouted before entering the building to search for the kids.

The Arcade was dimly lit, apart from the many blinking colorful arcade cabinets. Spotting the party was also no big deal, as he just had to walk to the loudest and most obnoxious group of young teenagers huddled around one machine.

„Go Go Go!“, the Wheeler kid shouted, arguably Mike was the guy he liked the least from the bunch. Will was sitting in front of the cabinet and tried to kill some monster-looking beasts. His eyes sharply focused on the bright screen and apparently being successful with his killing spree, as the small crowd around him continued to cheer on him.

He was glad that Will was able to enjoy his life again a bit. He knew that he was still a jumpy kid and sometimes zoned out, but at least the other Party members were able to distract him from his gruesome past. It was a miracle that this poor kid survived the horror of the Upside Down and the Mindflayer. Steve promised himself that he would check up with the kid sometime soon. He knew it was not his job and the other members of the party sure knew more of what happened. Steve was after all more of a secondary character in the whole chaos. However, he could not help but feel especially protective of the younger Byers and so wanted to let him know he could always come to him.

Steve continued to stand behind the group and amused himself at the sight of the overly excited kids. When the game finally finished, judging by the loud cheers of everyone but Will himself, who just smiled bashfully, the kid won. Or broke a record, or just did well.

Steve actually did not care at all.

He clapped Dustin and Lucas on the shoulders, as they stood nearest to him and raised his voice over the excited chattering. „Sorry guys but the party is over now, we really got to go!“, and now directed at Max, „Your brother is waiting for you on the parking lot.“.

The talking did die down at that. The Party was still not on good terms with the asshole, rightfully so. Max look turned sour at the mention. „He is not my brother!“, she stated, a certain spite not possible to overhear. Steve raised his hands in defense „Whatever, Billy is here and has been annoying me, so you better go before he starts up shit.“.

„And the rest of you“, he added looking at the boys, „let’s go!“.

He did not miss Lucas and Max hugging for a bit longer than the rest. While he did not understand the whole nature of their relationship it was kind of cute. He just hoped they would be careful around Billy and his dad.

Steve ushered the kids outside as Dustin was eating his ear off once again, telling him all about the game Will just won and of course about the record Lucas did break. Max bid the boys and Steve farewell and walked over to Billy's Camaro, who was sitting on the hood and smoked.

Seeing Billy smoking immediately triggered Steve's own urge for a cigarette. He would have to wait till he was back home again for that. First, he had to do his job as a taxi driver to drive the kids.

The ride was filled with chatting and the boys stayed mostly calm, besides the all so typical fight between Dustin and Will about the radio station they wanted to listen to. As Steve's patience was nearing a low point he just turned off the radio altogether. He really needed a beer or a good night's sleep. Preferably both.